

Food stamps

June 16 is deadline for comments on **Agriculture Dept.'s Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS)** proposed regulations to carry out provisions of the Food Stamp Act of 1977.

The Food Stamp Act of 1977 is the most comprehensive and detailed revision of the Food Stamp Program since it first started operating in 1964. Agriculture said, "The changes would assure that those with the highest income—and therefore not significantly in need of food stamps—would no longer qualify, while we do a better job of reaching those who truly are in need."

One change in the eligibility requirements will be the lowering of the net income cutoff which is \$6,960 for a family of 4. The net income cutoff will be changed to equal the Federal non-farm poverty level which is \$6,200 a year for a family of 4. This tighter standard is expected to drop 1.3 million people from the program.

There are also stricter rules on student participation, and households owning luxury cars will become ineligible.

Under the new regulation the requirement that participants pay a certain amount of cash to buy food stamps will be dropped. For example, instead of low-income consumers paying \$50 for \$150 worth of food stamps, they would pay no cash and receive \$100 worth of food stamps. This action was proposed by President Carter, who said some poor families are unable to get food stamps because they cannot make the required cash payment. This provision is expected to add over 3 million new participants.

Agriculture expects a crackdown on fraud because of new uniform penalties for food stamp participants found guilty of fraud. For instance, persons convicted of food stamp fraud would not be allowed to participate in the program for up to 2 years.

Other areas affected by the regulations are certification and issuance procedures, research and demonstration authority, and retailer/wholesaler participation. The changes are intended to tighten eligibility criteria, facilitate participation by eligible households, strengthen program administration, and reduce fraud and abuse.

Agriculture expects the rules to take effect late this year. After that, states will have several months to prepare for and implement the rules.

Details—*Federal Register*: May 2, page 18874. Send comments to Nancy Snyder, Food and Nutrition Service, Agriculture Dept., Washington, DC 20250. For more information write or call Alberta Frost at above address; telephone 202-447-6993.

Telephone needs for hearing-impaired consumers

June 26 is new deadline for comments on **Federal Communications Commission's (FCC)** inquiry into the telecommunication needs of the deaf and hearing impaired.

FCC estimates that there are more than 13 million persons in the US with impaired hearing. The deaf are barred from many customary human interactions because they are unable to use telephones which are taken for granted by persons with normal hearing. FCC points out that "it was Alexander Graham Bell's keen interest in speech and the deaf, 100 years ago, which gave us the telephone . . . In light of this history it is ironic that today [the hearing impaired] enjoy so little benefit from the vast modern switched telephone network."

FCC has opened this inquiry to find out what telecommunications services for the deaf are available today, what communication needs of the deaf are *not* being met today, and how modern technology in the communications field can be used to meet these needs.

FCC says its prime objective is to offer a nationwide forum where communications common carriers and other communications-related equipment providers can interact with the deaf community to better understand their needs. Also, FCC plans to use the comments it receives in making other policies.

The main means of telephone communication now available to the deaf are teletypewriter terminals (TTY) which permit a caller to communicate with other TTY users through the regular telephone system. The national network of TTYs consists of 15,000 to 30,000 instruments found in private homes and in more than 400 schools and other organizations serving deaf consumers.

FCC is particularly interested in receiving comments on the following questions:

- Is there a need for new, specialized communication services for the deaf?
- Should the FCC require the telephone company to provide special services for TTY users such as special TTY operators, and coin-operated TTY terminals in public places (like pay phones)?
- Is it necessary, for the benefit of hearing aid users, for FCC to establish standards to deal with problems such as electromagnetic leakage in the manufacturing of telephone handsets?
- Should the deaf pay less for the services they receive? And would special TTY rates encourage more TTY use?

Hearing-impaired individuals may file comments over a 24-hour, unattended, hard-copy TTY terminal which FCC has installed in Washington, DC. Instructions for using the TTY are:

- Dial 202-254-9292. (This is not a toll-free number.)
- You will receive the following message: "You have reached an *unattended* TTY at the FCC in Washington. Please type in your message — It will be recorded automatically. You can reach our *attended* TTY at 202-632-6999 between 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. weekdays."
- Upon completion of the automatic message, immediately start to type your reply. The machine will *not* give you a (GA) Go Ahead.
- The unattended machine is activated by your TTY reply.

Any silent period of 15 seconds will cut off your phone connection. It is important that you at least hit the period key during any delay that lasts 10 seconds. This will keep your telephone connection open until you have completed your message.

Details—*Federal Register*: May 4, page 19292; Feb. 21, page 7263. CONSUMER NEWS: Jan. 15, 1977, Nov. 1, 1977 and April 1, 1976. Send comments to CC Docket 78-50, Federal Communications Commission, Washington, DC 20554. For more information write or call James K. Smith at above address; telephone 202-632-9342.

NOTE: As CONSUMER NEWS has reported in the past, **Amtrak** has for some time maintained a reservation system for deaf persons who have compatible teletypewriters in their homes. In addition, a non-profit organization called **Organization for Use of the Telephone, Inc. (OUT)**, P.O. Box 175, Owings Mills, MD 21117 has been trying to solve the problems of compatible and incompatible phones for hearing aid users. And finally, a free booklet published by Teletypewriters for the Deaf, Inc., may be obtained by writing to that organization at P.O. Box 28332, Washington, DC 20013.

Household movers

June 30 is deadline for comments on **Interstate Commerce Commission's (ICC)** proposal to require household moving companies to charge shippers only what they originally estimated the moving costs would be. In other words, the proposed regulations would make estimates binding on carriers (movers) when those estimates are provided for individual c.o.d. shippers of household goods. (As in ICC's 1977 performance report on the nation's 20 largest moving companies — reported in this issue of **CONSUMER NEWS** — the proposed rule would affect only the individual c.o.d. shipments and not those paid for by **Defense Dept.** or other Federal agencies or by private corporations that pay their employees' moving expenses.)

ICC says it is worried about increasing evidence that some moving companies and agents are underestimating the costs of transporting household goods and depending upon the system of weight-computed charges to increase the actual bill to the consumer.

ICC estimated that during 1977 nearly one third of all shipments transported for individual householders were underestimated by more than 10%, and as a result many consumers had to pay substantially more than they had expected. In many cases they had to find money to pay for the added charges at a time when they could hardly afford to do so.

Present ICC rules say that consumers moving under a c.o.d. arrangement must eventually pay the entire amount charged for the move, although the carrier at the time of delivery can collect no more than 10% above the estimated figure. Fifteen days' credit must be given for any remaining balance.

"Whether an underestimate is deliberate (in order to obtain a particular shipper's business) or inadvertent (as in the misquotation of the applicable rates), the harm is the same," ICC pointed out. And regardless of the reason, ICC believes full responsibility for estimates rests with the moving companies.

Details—*Federal Register*: May 2, page 18712. Send comments to Secretary, Interstate Commerce Commission, Washington, DC 20423. For more information write or call Michael Erenberg at above address; telephone 202-275-7292.

Car thefts

July 31 is deadline for comments on **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA)** proposal to amend its regulations to reduce car thefts attributed to joyrides and petty thievery.

In 1976 about one million cars and other vehicles were stolen, and of that figure, 350,000 were estimated to be stolen for joyriding. They are involved in one out of every 350 accidents and cause about 5,100 disabling injuries and 130 deaths each year.

In March 1976 NHTSA issued an advance notice of a proposed rule that would help make cars more theft-proof. At that time the agency asked for comments from government, industry, consumers and consumer groups. NHTSA received 61 comments, 35 in favor of the proposal and 26 opposed. After reviewing the comments, NHTSA is proposing the following requirements:

- Stronger ignition locking systems that would make the systems inoperative if any part of the ignition lock is re-

moved. In addition, it would require that the activating wires be shielded so they cannot be directly contacted from within the passenger compartment.

- Interior latch release for hood that would be operated and located only from inside the car.
- Two-key system that would have separate keys for the ignition lock system and door and trunk locks.
- Alarm to prevent leaving key in the ignition that would go off whenever the car's ignition was turned off, the key not removed from the ignition lock, and the door opened and closed. The alarm would continue until the key was removed.

NHTSA estimates that the proposal will add about \$1.50 to the cost of manufacturing a passenger car, and \$3.70 to the cost of manufacturing a truck or multipurpose passenger vehicle.

Details—*Federal Register*: May 1, page 18577; March 4, 1976, page 9374. **CONSUMER REGISTER**: March 15, 1976. Send comments to Docket 1-21, Notice 4, Docket Section, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington, DC 20590. For more information write or call Kevin Cavey at above address; telephone 202-426-2720.

Christmas tree lights

July 3 is deadline for comments on **Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC)** proposed safety standards for miniature Christmas tree lights. CPSC has also scheduled a public hearing on the standards June 7 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 305 (CPSC headquarters), 1111 18th St., NW, Washington, DC. Although the June 2 deadline for notifying CPSC of interest in speaking at the hearing has almost passed, consumers and others may attend as observers.

The standards are intended to eliminate or reduce fire and shock hazards to consumers caused by indoor and outdoor miniature Christmas tree lights.

Included in the proposal are specific requirements for proper wiring to minimize overheating; detailed design and performance requirements for plugs and connectors; and requirements for light bulbs and bulb sockets. Also proposed are requirements for conspicuous cautionary information labels such as, "Do not use on trees with metal or metallic needles, leaves or branch coverings."

As early as 1973 CPSC had received reports of incidents and injuries due to electrical shocks and fires associated with miniature Christmas tree lights. As a result of these reports, CPSC in 1974 encouraged certain manufacturers to voluntarily recall some of their light sets.

Since then CPSC accepted an offer from **National Consumers League (NCL)**, a national voluntary consumer organization, to develop a recommended consumer product safety standard for miniature Christmas tree and similar decorative lights. [See **CONSUMER REGISTER** Aug. 15, 1977.] The present proposed regulation was derived from NCL's report and includes changes, adjustments and additional CPSC requirements.

Details—*Federal Register*: May 3, page 19136; June 30, 1977, page 33359. **CONSUMER REGISTER**: Aug. 15, 1977. Send comments to Secretary, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207. For more information write or call Carl W. Blechschmidt at above address; telephone 301-492-6557.

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